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Segye Ilbo
ROK Alone in Grappling with High Inflation among OECD Countries, Due Mainly to a Weaker Currency

Domestic Developments

[11. Japan's Prime Minister Taro Aso arrived in Seoul yesterday for a summit today with President Lee Myung-bak. This summit will focus on boosting economic cooperation and the North Korean nuclear issue.](#)
(All)

[12. According to USFK, USFK Army and Air Force personnel, along with F-16 fighter jets and PAC-3 missiles, begin a week-long war exercise](#)

today. (Dong-a)

International News

¶1. According to an ROKG source, North Korea last month delivered to the U.S. a request to send a representative to the Jan. 20 inauguration of U.S. President-elect Barack Obama. This North Korean move clearly indicates that North Korea is willing to take a more cooperative stance toward Washington, with a new liberal administration in charge. (JoongAng)

¶2. According to multiple sources knowledgeable about North Korean affairs, North Korea last year sold \$100 million worth of weapons to countries in the Middle East and Africa while engaging in negotiations to end its nuclear programs. (Dong-a)

¶3. According to a source in Beijing, North Korea has opened a consulate office in Dandong, a major Chinese city bordering North Korea. This signals that North Korea is keen to reinforce bilateral trade with China. (Hankook)

Media Analysis

North Korea

Right-of-center JoongAng Ilbo gave front-page play to a report quoting an ROKG source as saying yesterday that North Korea notified the U.S. last month that it would like to send a representative to the Jan. 20 inauguration of U.S. President-elect Barack Obama. The source was further quoted as saying: "This North Korean move clearly E indicates that North Korea is willing to take a more cooperative stance toward Washington, with a new liberal administration in charge."

Citing multiple sources knowledgeable about North Korean affairs, conservative Dong-a Ilbo's front-page report said that North Korea sold \$100 million worth of weapons to countries in the Middle East and Africa last year, while engaging in negotiations to end its nuclear programs. In a related development, conservative Segye Ilbo replayed a Jan. 10 Kyodo News report quoting a high-ranking North Korean official as saying that North Korea will dismantle all its nuclear weapons after it establishes its diplomatic ties with the U.S.

Moderate Hankook Ilbo quoted a source in Beijing as saying yesterday that North Korea has opened a consulate office in Dandong, a major Chinese city bordering North Korea. The report went on to say that this signals that the communist state is keen to reinforce bilateral trade with China.

Gaza

The Israeli military offensive in Gaza continued to receive wide attention. Conservative Chosun Ilbo reported that Israel indicated for the first time on Jan. 11 that an end was in sight to its war on Hamas. Chosun quoted Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert as saying during a Jan. 11 Cabinet meeting: "Israel is approaching the goals it has set for its operation, even though more patience and determination are required in order to reach these goals."

Right-of-center JoongAng Ilbo, meanwhile, reported that Israel is stepping up its offensive on Gaza after rejecting a UN Security Council resolution calling for a halt to the fighting. The report went on to say that Israel and Hamas are also waging a fierce publicity war to sway international opinion to their side. Moderate Hankook Ilbo headlined its story: "The Cruelty in Gaza Exceeds All Imagination." Left-leaning Hankyoreh Shinmun carried a quote from Israeli defense officials who said on Jan. 10 (local time) that they are prepared for a third stage of their offensive, indicating that Israeli ground forces would push further into Gaza.

Most of the ROK media also gave attention to the anti-Israeli protests held across the world over the weekend against Israel's military offensive in the Gaza Strip.

Features

**Pyongyang Wants Envoy at Obama's Inauguration
(JoongAng Ilbo, January 12, 2009, Front Page)**

Reporter Yeh Young-june

North Korea last month said it wanted to send a representative to the Jan. 20 inauguration of U.S. President-elect Barack Obama. But Washington has so far remained reluctant to accept the request, according to South Korean government sources.

"The North, through its United Nations mission office in New York, conveyed the message that it can send Vice Foreign Minister Kim Gye-gwan as a representative to the inauguration ceremony," said the source. The message was first delivered to The Korea Society, an U.S. nonprofit organization that promotes Korea-U.S. relations, and was later delivered to the Obama transition staff.

The Korea Society, a New York-based group which counts many members who once served as prominent diplomats, is helping to arrange the historic concert of the State Symphony Orchestra of DPRK in the U.S. "We don't know for now whether the Obama team has made a decision to accept the request or not," the source said. "I've heard negative opinions far outweighed the positive views."

The latest request from Pyongyang, however, clearly indicates that the North is poised to take a more cooperative stance towards Washington, with a new liberal administration in charge. "Pyongyang may be trying to test the political waters in the Obama Administration by watching Washington's response," the source said.

Other government sources in Seoul also said it is unlikely the U.S. will invite Kim, also Pyongyang's chief negotiator for the six-party talks on denuclearizing the North, while the Obama Administration has yet to clearly map out its North Korea policy. The current setback in the talks - with the North refusing to offer a clear verification protocol on its nuclear facilities - further clouds any possibility for Washington to invite Pyongyang's envoy to the inauguration.

The Peace Foundation, a Seoul-based civic group that makes policy suggestions on national security and inter-Korean relations, proposed last November that Washington invite the North's special envoy to the inauguration ceremony to cement momentum to form better North Korea-U.S. relations under the new administration.

* This is a translation provided by the newspaper, and it is identical to the Korean version.

Ambassador Stephens: "Obama Will Take a Package Approach toward North Korea's Nuclear Dismantlement and the Establishment of Diplomatic Ties"

(Dong-a Ilbo, January 10, 2009, Page 8)

By Reporter Kim Jung-ahn

An interview with U.S. Ambassador to the ROK Kathleen Stephens

"The incoming Administration will maintain the large frameworks of trade policy and the Six-Party Talks... The ROK's additional troop dispatch to Afghanistan will help ROK-U.S. relations"

"The interest shown by Koreans in U.S. President-elect Barack Obama and what he represents about the 'American dream' will help deepen the bilateral relations."

U.S. Ambassador to the ROK Kathleen Stephens made the statement during a December 30, 2008, interview with Dong-a Ilbo, adding that the launch of the Obama Administration is also very encouraging for ROK-U.S. relations.

Regarding U.S. President-elect Obama's "tough and direct diplomacy" toward North Korea, she said, "It is a 'comprehensive package' policy toward North Korea, which is aimed at North Korea's nuclear dismantlement as well as the normalization of diplomatic ties between North Korea and the U.S. and between North Korea and Japan, and that is in line with the September 19 Joint Statement adopted at

the Six-Party Talks in September 2005."

These remarks are noteworthy because they came amid speculation by Washington sources that, based on the principle of "the more Pyongyang gives up, the more it gets," the incoming U.S. Administration will take a comprehensive approach toward Pyongyang, which encompasses North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, economic aid, and a security guarantee.

Ambassador Stephens also said that the ROK and the U.S. will discuss ways to expand the ROK's contribution to Afghanistan, hinting that a request from the incoming U.S. Administration for (the ROK) to dispatch additional troops to Afghanistan will be forthcoming.

IQ. Some say that the Six-Party Talks have ended in failure.

IA. The Six-Party Talks are a difficult negotiation process, and there is work still to be done. However, the incoming Administration does not disagree, either, that the Six-Party Talks are the best way. Don't you also have the Korean proverb, "Well begun is half done"? Within the framework of the Six-Party Talks, a variety of ideas are coming up. Through the Six-Party Talks, we have built a pattern of consultation, and the U.S. and China also have deepened their understanding and cooperation.

IQ. Some analysts say that the reason why Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi abandoned a nuclear-arms development effort is that he was guaranteed his safety and power. Can North Korean Chairman Kim Jong-il make the same calculation?

IA. The DPRK will have a better future absent nuclear weapons. The "future" that the North should dream of was laid out in the September 2005 Joint Statement.

IQ. Do you think that the ROK's additional troop deployment to Afghanistan will have a positive impact on the ROK-U.S. alliance?

IA. The ROK has made remarkable contributions overseas through its active volunteer activities. In the same context, additional troop dispatch will contribute to developing ROK-U.S. relations into a more "broad and dynamic" alliance. President-elect Obama has made clear that "we" need to think about how to contribute regarding the situation in Afghanistan. Here, "we" encompasses all allies, including the ROK. This is not yet the time to talk about the specific details, but I think the ROK also has an intention to participate in such a "conversation."

IQ. Many people are concerned that, due to an economic downturn, the U.S.'s viewpoint on free trade may change. In particular, many are skeptical of the prospects for the ratification of the ROK-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

IA. If you look at the Obama economic and trade team, you can see that the (members of the team) have very strong histories as proponents of free and fair trade. I do not think that the basis of trade policy will change much. Americans are also well aware that protectionism is not a solution to the economic crisis. The Obama Administration knows well that, in order to overcome economic challenges, countries like the ROK and the U.S., which are successful models of free trade, have to work together. The Obama Administration will take a detailed look at the FTA in that context.

Stephens
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